Securing Our Border

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Friday, February 08, 2008

Secretary Chertoff, I want to thank you for joining us here today to take another firsthand look at the realities of the border region.

The border is a favorite topic for the talking heads on TV and radio, sitting in their studios far from where we stand today. To them, the border is a line on a piece of paper that is easily recognized with foes that are easily recognized and challenges that are easily solved. They are wrong—because the complexities of this area are significant.

For example, we stand here today in a town named for a city in Scotland, in a county named for a Mexican war hero, in a state with a population that is 35% Hispanic. About twenty miles to the south of here is the border we share with our state’s largest trading partner, the nation of Mexico. Every day, goods and services flow through well-regulated border checkpoints, bolstering our respective economies, creating jobs and strengthening good relationships. Every night, a different kind of traffic picks up, with the criminal element attempting to penetrate the veil of security around our country, trafficking in drugs, human lives, and the proceeds of illegal activity.

The challenges we face fall into two key areas: securing the border and immigration policy. Today, our focus is on securing the border. As you have seen today and on your previous visits to the border, Texas is taking the initiative in addressing the border security challenge. Our primary approach is to coordinate existing resources and better equip our people on the front line. We enjoy a strong relationship with the Border Patrol and work closely together, coordinating their efforts with those of our local and state law enforcement agencies. It is especially fitting for us to be here today at this Border Patrol station. These folks truly are DHS’ Finest. This combined effort, most recently under the umbrella of Operation Border Star, has yielded impressive results.

By focusing our resources on key entry points and communicating freely among agencies, we have shown we can slow the bad guys to a stop when we want to. In addition to boots on the ground, boats on the water and birds in the air, there is a need for strategic fencing in high-traffic, urban areas. Along the Rio Grande, there is also the need for flood control. The river may be ankle-deep in some places, but can become a raging torrent after heavy rains. Your decision today to move forward with a solution that meets these dual needs is an example of your commitment to finding solutions that work on paper in Washington and on the ground here at the border.

We are encouraged by your receptiveness to local feedback and looking forward to more opportunities to forge mutually-effective solutions to the unique challenges in this area.